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ABSTRACT

Withdrawing, continuing, and nonreturning undergraduates at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) were compared. Nonreturning students were nongraduating students who completed course requirements but did not return the following semester (25 spring nonreturning students and 47 fall nonreturning students). Data were also collected from all 277 undergraduates who voluntarily withdrew during the fall 1981 semester and from 47 continuing students. Findings include the following: more students withdrawing in midsemester were undecided regarding their majors than was the case for the continuers or nonreturning students; more withdrawing students tended to live off campus independently than did continuers or nonreturners; withdrawing students usually left school due to academic difficulties, school/work conflicts, or personal problems, while nonreturners tended to leave because of dissatisfaction with UMBC in particular; and continuers reported talking to a large number of UMBC people outside of class, while withdrawing students talked to student services staff but had little outside-class interaction with faculty and students. Information concerning nine possible reasons students attended UMBC is also presented, and the findings are discussed in terms of both student commitment to goals and to UMBC. (SW)

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ACADEMIC LEAVE AND WITHDRAWAL OFFICE RESEARCH REPORT:

Comparisons among Continuing, Withdrawing,
and Non-returning Students

Kimberly Daubman and Deborah Hazel Johnson

Student Affairs Research Report #7
September 1982

Special thanks are also due to Gerard Sykes, Judy DiNunno, Kathryn Brown, Valerie Masten and Tyra Hemsley for their assistance in completing this study.

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Highlights

- More students withdrawing in mid-semester (withdrawals) are undecided regarding their majors than is the case for the overall student body (continuers) or students who leave UMBC after completing the semester (non-returning students) (pages 7-8).
- More withdrawals hold full-time jobs during school than do continuers or non-returns (page 8).
- Withdrawals tend more often to live off campus independently than do continuers or non-returns (pages 8-9).
- Withdrawals usually leave school due to academic difficulties, school/work conflicts, or personal problems; those continuers who consider leaving focus more on disliking college in general (page 9). Non-returns tend to leave because of dissatisfaction with UMBC in specific (page 13).
- Continuers report talking to a large number of UMBC people outside of class; withdrawals, in contrast, do talk to student service staff but have little outside-class interaction with faculty and students (page 12).
- Continuers are more dissatisfied with UMBC than are the other groups, despite the fact that the continuing students are the ones who do not leave UMBC (page 13).

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The study of student withdrawal at UMBC has focused primarily on an intensive investigation of students voluntarily withdrawing in mid-semester (Gordon & Johnson, 1982; Susege & Johnson, 1982). While the results of these studies yielded a better understanding of withdrawals per se, the findings could not be viewed in the context of the larger UMBC student population, because we did not yet know how the withdrawing students compared with other students. For example, while we knew the extent to which the withdrawals were dissatisfied with UMBC, we did not know whether that level of dissatisfaction is any different from that of the student body as a whole. The next step, then, was to compare the withdrawals to other students, to better understand the characteristics associated with attrition of various sorts at UMBC. The study described in this Report was undertaken to fulfill that objective.

In addition to comparing withdrawals to the student body in general (we have labeled this latter group "continuing students"), we also were interested in beginning to differentiate between various types of attrition at UMBC. The published literature on retention has recently been criticized for considering all attrition in the same category (Tinto, 1975; Pantages & Creedon, 1978); these authors have called for investigators to recognize the differences between academic dismissal, voluntary permanent drop-out, and voluntary temporary leaving. Tinto notes that these different types of dropping out may stem from quite different processes, and that students of one dropout type may have quite different characteristics and needs from those in another type. Accordingly, the current study sought to compare voluntary mid-semester withdrawals and continuing students to students successfully completing the semester but not returning to UMBC for the following semester (we have labeled this group "non-returners").

In conceptualizing the processes which might lead a student to withdraw, to continue, or to non-return, we have used the model of student dropout presented by Tinto (1975). While many investigators have determined that retention is related to such individualistic student characteristics as academic performance and aptitude (Astin, 1964; Bean & Covert, 1973; Maudal, Butcher, & Mauger, 1974; Peng & Fетters, 1978) and personality (Astin, 1964; Bean & Covert, 1973), Tinto views retention as a measure of the individual's integration into the university. Briefly, Tinto draws from Durkheim's (1961) sociological theory of suicide, since both suicide and dropout are voluntary means of an individual's withdrawing from a system. Tinto's model stresses the importance of a student being integrated into a university both academically and socially in order for the student to be retained; attrition, then, is seen as the result of a failure in either academic or social integration. Translating this model to the level of predicting an individual student's retention at a particular time, Tinto uses the concepts of goal commitment (general educational expectations) and institutional commitment (predispositions to attend that one particular university).

A student's experiences in the college academic and social systems "continually modify his goal and institutional commitments in ways which lead to persistence and/or varying forms of dropout" (Tinto, 1975, p. 94).

The current study used the ideas of goal commitment and institutional commitment to compare withdrawals, continuing students, and non-returning students. Since goal commitment refers to the level and intensity of a student's general educational expectations, we suspected that withdrawals might have less goal commitment than non-returners, who might have certain goals (e.g., major) inconsistent with UMBC but be otherwise quite committed. A continuing student might feel dissatisfied but be adequately committed to

goals and institution that he or she would remain, while such dissatisfactions might interact with a withdrawing student's lack of commitment to produce withdrawal. Specifically, do goal commitment variables such as reason for coming to college and intended major have implications for different types of attrition at UMBC? Do institutional commitment variables such as reasons for coming to UMBC and involvement at UMBC differentiate between withdrawals, continuing students, and non-returners?

We feel that successful attrition prevention programs need to take into account the ways in which students who leave UMBC differ from those who stay. Also, differences between students who withdraw from a semester and students who fail to return after a successful semester may indicate the need for differing attrition prevention strategies for different subgroups of the student population. For instance, increasing the institutional commitment of students by offering more opportunity for student-faculty interactions and extracurricular activities might help reduce attrition due to lack of institutional commitment, but would not have much impact on students leaving due to goal commitment issues. Accordingly, an important aspect of this study was to clarify the specific types of attrition programs which could assist each type of student.

METHOD

Subjects

Withdrawals. Data were collected from all 277 undergraduate students who voluntarily withdrew from UMBC during the Fall semester 1981.

Non-returning students. This category was divided into two groups: those nongraduating undergraduates who completed Fall semester 1980 but did not return the following semester (Spring non-returning students) and those completing the Spring semester 1981 but not returning the following Fall 1981

semester (Fall non-returning students). One hundred students were randomly selected from each group; due to difficulty reaching these students, the final numbers participating in the study were 25 Spring non-returning students and 47 Fall non-returning students.

Continuing students. One hundred students were randomly selected from the population of students enrolled in the Fall semester 1981 who had also successfully completed the Spring semester 1981. 47 of these continuing students were able to be contacted to serve as participants in the study. These students were intended to be representative of the regular student body in general.

Procedure

Students who came to the Academic Leave and Withdrawal Office (ALWO) during the Fall semester 1981 to withdraw from UMBC first underwent an interview conducted by one of the office interviewers. After the interview, the student was asked to complete a brief questionnaire. For the purposes of this study, the questionnaire elicited the following information: (1) the reason(s) the student had for coming to college; (2) the reason(s) the student had for choosing UMBC; (3) the student's major; (4) whether the student held a job; (5) the student's residence; and (6) the number of times the student interacted with faculty, various staff, and other students while on campus. As the student was filling out the student questionnaire, the interviewer completed the interviewer questionnaire indicating (1) the reason(s) the student had for withdrawing and (2) the dissatisfactions, if any, the student had with UMBC.

Parallel information was collected from both non-returning students and continuing students. All of these students were called by an ALWO interviewer either until they were reached or until two attempts to reach them in the

morning, afternoon, and evening each had been made. The non-returning students participated in phone interviews during the months of January, February and March 1982, and the continuing students participated during the months of November and December 1981.

Because open-ended questions (those to which respondents can reply in any way they wish) can sometimes yield different results from those obtained through closed-ended questions (in which respondents may choose one of several pre-determined response choices), an effort was made to standardize question type for the different sample groups.

Questions that the interviewers answered on the basis of an open-ended interview with the withdrawing students were asked in an open-ended style to both non-returning and continuing students; questions that the withdrawing students answered directly in a written questionnaire format were asked in a close-ended style to non-returning and continuing students. Although withdrawing students responded in writing to many questions that non-returns and continuers answered verbally, we feel that the data collected under the two conditions can be compared. Some justification for this position can be found in a previous ALWO report (Susege & Johnson, 1982), which found that interviewers, when answering questions on the basis of an interview, respond similarly to students who answer the same questions in a written questionnaire format.

RESULTS

The analyses of the results examined the effect of student type (withdrawal vs. non-returning student vs. continuing student) on the various questionnaire items. Because the research questions were concerned with differences between the student types, either one-way analyses of variance or chi-squares were performed to test for group differences. When preliminary

analyses of variance revealed no differences between Fall and Spring non-returning students, these two groups were combined for the main analysis, which then had three levels of the independent variable (withdrawal, non-returning, and continuing students). When the Fall and Spring non-returning students were found to differ, the main analysis used four levels of the independent variable (Fall non-returns, Spring non-returns, withdrawals, and continuers).

Main analyses of variance showing overall significant differences between student types were then followed by Scheffe post-hoc comparisons, to determine where these differences occurred. All group differences reported below were statistically significant beyond the $p < .05$ level; that is, differences have less than a 5% chance of occurring by chance alone.

To present our results most cogently, we refer to Tinto's previously-mentioned concepts of goal commitment (commitment to general educational goals) and institutional commitment (commitment to a particular educational institution). We will group our variables according to this distinction, to highlight the conceptual issues underlying specific variables; however, it should be noted that these groupings were done conceptually rather than empirically.

Goal Commitment

Our initial hypothesis was that withdrawals would be less goal-committed than either non-returning or continuing students. We suspected that students who completed the semester had educational goals as a high priority, while those leaving in mid-semester (withdrawals) might have off-campus concerns as higher priorities than their education. We used several variables to measure goal commitment: reason for coming to college, having decided on an intended major, holding a job during the semester, place of residence during the

semester, and certain reasons for (considering) leaving school.

Reasons for Coming to College. Using a close-ended question-and-answer format, students indicated whether twelve predetermined reasons for coming to college were very important, somewhat important, or not important for them in making their decision to attend college. Percentages of students rating each reason as very important and somewhat important are displayed in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Analyses of variance revealed that withdrawals reported wanting to get a better job as a significantly more important reason for coming to college than did non-returning students. No other differences between student types occurred on reasons for coming to college, nor were there differences in terms of number of reasons reported.

Intended Major at UMBC. Students were asked to indicate their intended major at UMBC. Nine categories of majors were determined and the percentages of students indicating each major are displayed in Table 2. It should be noted that "undeclared" is not a category. Many students who are officially "undeclared" have indeed decided upon a major. In this case, they indicated the major upon which they had decided. Other students who were undeclared were indeed undecided. These students are represented in the "undecided" row of Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

A cross tabulation was performed using sample as one variable and indicated major as the second variable. A chi-square statistic was computed, revealing a statistically significant distribution. As can be seen from the table, proportionately more withdrawing students than continuing and non-returning students were undecided as to their major. Also, it appears that there were disproportionate numbers of Fall non-returns who were math or

TABLE 1

Percentage of Spring non-returns, Fall non-returns, withdrawals, and continuers indicating very and somewhat important reasons for coming to college

Reasons for Coming to College	Sp Non-returns		Fl Non-returns		Withdrawals		Continuers	
	v imp	sw imp	v imp	sw imp	v imp	sw imp	v imp	sw imp
Parents wanted student to attend	28.0	28.0	28.3	21.7	23.7	33.9	10.6	40.4
Student couldn't find a job	4.0	8.0	2.2	6.5	2.6	9.0	0.0	10.6
To get away from home	4.0	4.0	4.3	13.0	3.8	8.5	2.1	8.5
To get a better job*	40.0	32.0	56.5	30.4	69.5	19.9	70.2	21.3
To gain a general education and appreciation of ideas	48.0	36.0	54.3	37.0	68.0	22.5	61.7	31.9
To improve reading and study skills	24.0	44.0	17.4	45.7	36.2	36.7	14.9	55.3
There was nothing better to do	0.0	12.0	8.7	6.5	3.9	8.2	2.1	12.8
To become a more cultured person	20.0	48.0	32.6	41.3	29.4	47.2	40.4	42.6
To be able to make more money	40.0	44.0	45.7	47.8	49.6	37.1	42.6	38.3
To learn more about topics of interest	72.0	28.0	73.9	21.7	72.5	23.7	68.1	27.7
To meet new and interesting people	40.0	44.0	34.8	47.8	29.1	51.1	25.5	48.9
To prepare for graduate or professional school	36.0	16.0	50.0	19.6	50.2	28.1	46.8	19.1
	(n=25)		(n=46)		(n=240)		(n=47)	

*p < .05

TABLE 2

Percentages of Spring non-returns, Fall non-returns, withdrawals, and continuers indicating various majors

	Sp non-returns	F1 non-returns	Withdrawals	Continuers
Fine Arts	8.0	4.3	6.4	19.1
Social Sciences	36.0	21.3	26.5	25.5
Math or Natural Sciences	32.0	55.3	36.8	38.3
Languages	0.0	0.0	1.3	4.3
Undecided	4.0	10.6	21.8	8.5
Unavailable	8.0	0.0	3.4	0.0
Dual Major	12.0	0.0	0.9	4.3
Nondegree Seeking	0.0	8.5	2.1	0.0
Option II	0.0	0.0	0.9	0.0
	(n=25)	(n=47)	(n=234)	(n=47)

NOTE: The percentage of undecided withdrawing students was greater than the percentage of undecided continuers or non-return students. Also, it appears that there were disproportionate numbers of Fall non-returns who were math or natural science majors and nondegree seeking. This distribution is statistically significant ($p < .001$).

natural science majors and Fall non-returns who were nondegree seeking.

Jobs Held During an Enrolled Semester. At the time of withdrawal, withdrawing students were asked to indicate whether they held a paying job and if so, whether it was full or part-time. Continuing and non-returning students were asked to indicate whether they held no job, a part-time job, or a full-time job during the last complete semester they attended UMBC. Percentages of students indicating each of the three possible responses are displayed in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

A cross tabulation was performed using sample and job status as the two variables. A chi-square statistic was computed revealing a statistically significant distribution. Proportionately, many more withdrawing students than continuing and non-returning students held full-time jobs. Also, proportionately more non-returning students than continuers held jobs.

Housing During an Enrolled Semester. Withdrawing students were asked, at the time of withdrawal, to indicate whether they lived on campus, off campus with parents or guardians, or off campus independently. Continuing and non-returning students were asked to indicate where they lived during the last complete semester they attended UMBC. Percentages of students indicating each of the three possible responses are presented in Table 4.

Insert Table 4 about here

A cross tabulation was performed using sample and housing status as the two variables. A statistically significant distribution was revealed upon computing a chi-square statistic. As Table 4 illustrates, the percentage of withdrawing students living off campus independently as opposed to with parents was much greater than the percentage of non-returns or continuers living off campus independently as opposed to with parents.

TABLE 3

Percentages of Spring non-returns, Fall non-returns, withdrawals and continuers not working, working part-time, and working full-time during the last enrolled semester

	<u>Sp non-returns</u>	<u>F1 non-returns</u>	<u>Withdrawals</u>	<u>Continuers</u>
No Job	16.0	27.7	32.1	38.3
Part-Time	56.0	48.9	27.4	46.8
Full-Time	28.0	23.4	40.4	14.9
	(n=25)	(n=47)	(n=277)	(n=47)

NOTE: The percentage of withdrawing students holding full-time jobs is much greater than the percentage of continuers holding full-time jobs. Also, many more continuers than non-returns do not work. This distribution is statistically significant ($p < .001$).

TABLE 4

Percentage of Spring non-returns, Fall non-returns, withdrawals, and continuers who lived on campus, off campus with their parents or guardians and off campus independently

	Sp non-returns	F1 non-returns	Withdrawals	Continuers
On Campus	4.5	13.0	11.0	14.9
Off Campus (with parents)	72.7	65.2	36.2	59.6
Off Campus (independently)	22.7	21.7	52.8	25.5
	(n=22)	(n=46)	(n=246)	(n=47)

NOTE: The percentage of withdrawing students living off-campus independently as opposed to with parents is much greater than the percentage of non-returns or continuers living off-campus independently as opposed to with parents. This distribution is statistically significant ($p < .001$).

Reasons for (considering) Leaving. Using an open-ended interview format, withdrawing and non-returning students were asked about their reason(s) for leaving UMBC. Also, 22 out of 47 continuing students claimed to have thought about withdrawing from UMBC (but did not withdraw; these students were asked about the factor(s) involved in their consideration. Interviewers then coded ten predetermined reasons as very important, somewhat important, or not important for each students. The percentages of students giving reasons judged to be very important and somewhat important are displayed in Table 5.

Insert Table 5 about here

Some of the reasons for (considering) leaving were considered to indicate institutional commitment (i.e., "doesn't like UMBC" and "desired major not offered at UMBC"), and are thus described in the next section, rather than here.

The remaining reasons showed goal commitment differences among the three samples. Analyses of variance revealed that withdrawals more often left due to academic difficulties, school/work conflicts, and personal problems (not school related), as compared with the reasons the non-returning students left. Compared to the reasons continuing students had considered leaving, both withdrawals and non-returns less often reported disliking college as a major consideration for leaving. Also, non-returning students were less concerned about academic difficulties than were continuing students.

Looking overall at the number of reasons indicated for leaving or considering leaving, we found that both continuing and withdrawing students gave more reasons than did non-returns.

Summary of Goal Commitment Variables. We had originally speculated that withdrawing students would be less goal-committed than non-returning or continuing students, as indicated by their reasons for coming to college and

TABLE 5

Percentages of Spring non-returns, Fall non-returns, withdrawals and continuers giving reasons for leaving or consideration of leaving judged to be very or somewhat important

Reasons for (considering) Leaving UMBC	Sp Non-returns		Fl Non-returns		Withdrawals		Continuers	
	V imp	SW imp	V imp	SW imp	V imp	SW imp	V imp	SW imp
Academic Difficulties*	0.0	8.0	10.08	4.3	22.4	22.0	45.5	13.6
Lack of Money	16.0	8.0	17.8	8.9	11.3	10.5	13.6	4.5
Doesn't Like UMBC*	20.0	16.0	13.3	8.9	5.3	9.0	9.1	13.6
School/Work Conflict*	20.0	4.0	8.9	2.2	35.5	10.9	13.6	13.6
Doesn't Like College*	0.0	8.0	4.4	0.0	1.6	7.3	13.6	9.1
Desired Major Not Offered*	24.0	8.0	41.3	2.2	1.6	3.7	4.5	0.0
Unsure of Major of Why in School	8.0	8.0	6.7	6.7	6.1	11.5	0.0	22.7
School/Social Life Conflict	4.0	0.0	2.2	0.0	2.9	3.7	4.5	13.6
Wants a Break From School	4.0	16.0	2.2	0.0	3.3	10.3	4.5	13.6
Personal Problems* (Not School Related)	8.0	0.0	2.2	0.0	31.5	12.2	19.5	4.8
	(n=25)		(n=46)		(n=248)		(n=22)	

*p < .05

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or leaving it, decision as to intended major, working at a job while attending school, and residence while attending school. Indeed, the above findings largely confirmed this hypothesis. Withdrawers did tend to be more undecided about their major fields, to hold more full-time jobs during school, to more often live off-campus independently, and to leave school due to off-campus problems, compared to leavers or continuing students. The lifestyle of a withdrawing student, therefore, appears to show more commitment to off-campus interests and less to educational goals. The one finding seemingly at variance from this conceptualization arises in the students' reasons for coming to college; withdrawers more often saw college as enabling them to get better jobs. While this view would seem to indicate a firm goal related to education, an alternative explanation might be that withdrawers are so job-oriented that persisting through difficult academic courses on the way to that goal becomes onerous, and that the off-campus jobs of withdrawers then take on higher priority than the long-term educational goal. This interpretation is supported by the large amount of school/work conflict contributing to withdrawals' reasons for leaving school. At any rate, on the other variables we see a clear pattern of the continuing and non-returning students' educational commitment being reflected in their decidedness about a major, their relative lack of commitment to paid jobs during school, and their more frequent on-campus residence. They had less interference from off-campus problems in their schooling, making it easier to complete the semester. The non-returning students seem to have left UMBC for quite specific reasons unrelated to educational commitment; the continuing students had many reasons to withdraw, but did not. These latter two findings may be more clearly understood by considering students' commitment to UMBC in particular, which brings us to the next section.

Institutional Commitment

A second type of commitment thought to be necessary in a student's remaining at a particular university is institutional commitment. A student having a high goal commitment is not necessarily committed to attaining that goal at a particular university, as was seen previously in the case of non-returning students. Regarding institutional commitment, we expected that continuing students would have much more such commitment than would either withdrawers or non-returning students. It was not clear whether to expect withdrawers to be higher or lower on institutional commitment than non-returning students. Commitment to the institution was measured by the student's reasons for originally choosing to attend UMBC, involvement with people at UMBC, certain reasons for (considering) leaving UMBC, and dissatisfactions with UMBC.

Reasons for Choosing UMBC. A close-ended question-and-answer format was utilized for students to indicate whether nine predetermined reasons for choosing UMBC were very important, somewhat important, or not important for them in making their decision to attend UMBC. Percentages of students rating each reason as very important and somewhat important are presented in Table 6.

Insert Table 6 about here

Analyses of variance revealed two statistically significant differences among the groups. First, withdrawing students reported that UMBC having a convenient location was a more important reason for choosing UMBC than did non-returns, whereas neither non-returns nor withdrawals reported this reason more or less often than continuers. Second, both non-returns and continuers reported low tuition as a more important reason for coming to UMBC than did withdrawals. No two groups differed as to the number of reasons given for choosing UMBC. Thus, on this measure, institutional commitment was similar

TABLE 5

Percentages of Spring non-returns, Fall non-returns, withdrawals and continuers indicating very and somewhat important reasons for choosing UMBC

Reasons for Choosing UMBC	Sp Non-returns		Fl Non-returns		Withdrawals		Continuers	
	V imp	SW imp	V imp	SW imp	V imp	SW imp	V imp	SW imp
Relatives wanted student to attend UMBC	12.0	0.0	2.2	6.7	2.9	9.2	6.4	6.4
UMBC has good academic reputation	36.0	4.0	46.7	37.8	48.5	36.6	29.8	48.9
Student offered financial assistance	4.0	4.0	22.2	11.1	10.2	19.1	10.6	4.3
Student not accepted anywhere else	0.0	4.0	0.0	0.0	.9	3.0	2.1	2.1
Former or current UMBC student recommended UMBC	28.0	20.0	8.9	24.4	10.7	25.3	27.7	19.1
UMBC has a convenient location*	28.0	28.0	24.4	26.7	39.3	33.1	17.0	46.8
UMBC has low tuition	48.0	28.0	66.7	31.1	18.8	36.8	63.8	27.7
Friends attending or planning to attend UMBC	12.0	28.0	8.9	17.8	5.6	17.1	6.4	14.9
UMBC offers a specific academic program of interest	48.0	36.0	51.1	20.0	49.4	33.6	55.3	21.3
	(n=25)		(n=45)		(n=239)		(n=47)	

*p < .05

for the three subgroups but for somewhat different reasons.

Level of Involvement at UMBC. Using a closed-ended question-and-answer format, students indicated the number of times they talk(ed) to various faculty and staff and other UMBC students outside of the classroom in any given semester. Responses were coded as either once, two to five times, or six times or more. Percentages of students talking to these persons on the average of once and twice or more a semester are presented in Table 7.

Insert Table 7 about here

Analyses of variance revealed several significant differences among the groups: (1) continuers reportedly talked significantly more times to an instructor than did withdrawing students, (2) continuers, as compared to withdrawing students, indicated that they talked significantly more times to a faculty advisor, (3) non-returns indicated that they talked more frequently to UMBC students they had known before coming to UMBC than did withdrawing students, and (4) both non-returns and continuers reported that they talked more frequently to students they met at UMBC than did withdrawing students. Thus, withdrawals talked less frequently to several different categories of people at UMBC than did the other subgroups.

An additional analysis was computed using the number of different persons talked to on campus as the dependent variable. This analysis revealed that continuers, as compared to withdrawals, reported talking to more persons at UMBC. Non-returns were not found to differ from either continuers or withdrawals. On this measure, continuers seemed to have the highest degree of institutional commitment.

Reasons for (Considering) Leaving UMBC. Previously, we discussed several possible reasons for (considering) leaving school that were conceptualized as concerning general educational goal commitment; we found that withdrawals

TABLE 7

Percentages of Spring non-returns, Fall non-returns, withdrawals and continuers who talked to the following persons (outside of class) on the average of once and two or more times a semester

Persons Talked to Outside of Class	Sp non-returns		Fl non-returns		Withdrawals		Continuers	
	1	2+	1	2+	1	2+	1	2+
Instructors*	12.0	64.0	8.7	78.3	16.3	64.1	12.8	80.8
Faculty Advisor*	24.0	24.0	30.4	39.1	28.1	30.2	48.9	38.3
Allied Health Advisors	0.0	16.0	2.2	28.2	10.0	12.2	10.6	28.2
Learning Resources Center Tutor	4.0	16.0	6.5	28.2	10.3	22.7	14.9	27.6
Counseling Center Staff	20.0	16.0	6.5	17.4	16.0	11.7	12.8	10.7
Office of Residential Life Staff	0.0	12.0	6.5	17.4	9.0	7.7	4.3	14.9
Career Development and Placement Center Staff	12.0	20.0	15.2	8.7	15.0	12.4	21.3	14.9
Cooperative Education Staff	16.0	0.0	4.3	8.6	12.9	6.0	17.0	10.6
Financial Aid Staff	8.0	24.0	15.2	34.8	15.4	32.5	19.1	40.4
Students Known Before Coming to UMBC*	0.0	76.0	6.5	71.8	6.5	60.9	12.8	61.7
Students Met at UMBC*	4.0	84.0	0.0	97.9	3.0	68.5	0.0	100.0
	(n=25)		(n=46)		(n=239)		(n=47)	

*p < .05

often left due to off-campus problems that reflected lower goal commitment than was true in continuing or non-returning students. Here we shall consider two such reasons that fall under the heading "institutional commitment", because they reflect directly on commitment to UMBC rather than school in general.

On both of these reasons, analyses of variance revealed significant group differences. Non-returning students listed "not liking UMBC" as a reason for leaving more often than did withdrawing students. Similarly, non-returning students often left due to "UMBC not offering a desired major," while withdrawals and continuing students did not see this factor as that important in their considerations. On these reasons for leaving, then, non-returning students had less institutional commitment than did continuing students.

Dissatisfaction with UMBC. Based upon conclusions drawn from an open-ended question, interviewers indicated their impressions about whether the student was dissatisfied with UMBC. Percentages of students judged to be dissatisfied with at least one aspect of UMBC are displayed in Table 8. It is interesting to note that continuers were much more likely to be judged as dissatisfied with some aspect of UMBC than were either withdrawing or non-returning students.

Insert Table 8 about here

A chi-square analysis revealed this to be a very strong effect with a 1 in a 1000 chance of occurring with a "true" group difference. Accordingly, we find that on this measure of institutional commitment continuers were less positive than were the other subgroups.

Summary of Institutional Commitment Variables. Our original hypothesis concerning institutional commitment suggested that continuing students would have higher such commitment than non-returning or withdrawing students; we did

TABLE 8

Percentages of Spring non-returns, Fall non-returns, withdrawals, and continuers giving indication of being satisfied versus dissatisfied with UMBC

	Sp non-returns	F1 non-returns	Withdrawals	Continuers
Satisfied	75.0	71.4	79.4	40.9
Dissatisfied	25.0	28.6	20.6	59.1
	(n=24)	(n=42)	(n=247)	(n=22)

NOTE: Percentage of continuers expressing dissatisfaction with UMBC is significantly ($p < .001$) greater than the percentage of withdrawals or non-returns expressing dissatisfaction

not know whether to expect non-returning students to have higher or lower institutional commitment than withdrawing students. Here the various measures were somewhat more indirect than was the case for goal commitment, since the concept of commitment to a particular institution is less obvious.

The findings are diverse. True to our hypothesis, continuing students showed the highest degree of institutional commitment as manifested by the extent of their outside-class interactions with other UMBC people and the reasons they had considered leaving UMBC. Withdrawing students seemed to have a relatively low number of personal interactions at UMBC, perhaps making it easier for them to leave in mid-semester; while non-returning students often had a moderate number of interactions but left school due to not getting their need fulfilled at UMBC. Accordingly, we could conceptualize continuing students as well integrated into UMBC life, compared to withdrawing students; non-returning students had some degree of integration but wanted something UMBC did not provide.

However, other measures yielded different conclusions regarding institutional commitment. While students perhaps chose UMBC for different reasons, no one group had more reasons for coming to UMBC. On overall feelings about attending UMBC, continuing students showed much more dissatisfaction with the school than did withdrawals or non-returning students. In the subsequent Discussion section we shall attempt to integrate these diverse findings.

Discussion

We began this Report by using the concepts of goal commitment and institutional commitment to better understand the different types of student attrition. The results described above indicate that these types of commitment do differentiate between mid-semester withdrawals, non-returning

students, and the overall student body (continuing students). Below, we shall describe the typical characteristics of students in each subgroup, as distinguished from the other subgroups.

The overall student body appears to be quite committed to general educational goals. These continuing students are apt to have made a choice of major. A higher percentage lives on campus compared to withdrawing students, and fewer continuing students hold jobs. Those that do have jobs tend to work part-time rather than full-time. These students might seem to have lower goal commitment as manifested by having considered withdrawing from school due to not liking college or academic difficulties. However, it is probably indicative of a higher goal commitment that they continue to stay in school despite these concerns. Similarly, their institutional commitment is demonstrated by the fact that while more continuing students note dissatisfactions with UMBC, they did not consider these dissatisfactions as strong reasons to leave UMBC. They are well-integrated into the school, having more interactions with both staff and newly-met students than do the withdrawers.

The non-returning students, having completed the semester but then not coming back to UMBC the next semester, demonstrate goal commitment comparable to the continuers but less institutional commitment. The non-returners often lived on campus, few held full-time jobs, and many are decided about their majors, as was the case for continuing students. There is, however, a higher number of non-returners holding jobs than is true for continuers; and reasons for leaving rarely concerned academic difficulties and dislike of college, both of which had been considered by continuers as possible reasons for leaving. The high educational commitment of non-returners combines with their lower commitment to UMBC in causing them to leave; they have comparatively few

reasons for leaving, primarily focusing on their dislike of UMBC and UMBC not offering their desired major. While here, they interacted more with other UMBC students than did withdrawers. We see the non-returning student as committed to the pursuit of educational goals, but these students found these goals unavailable at UMBC.

Finally, the mid-semester withdrawal often is more committed off-campus, with educational goals and involvement at UMBC taking (at least temporarily) lower priority. The withdrawal is very job-oriented, both in the initial reason for coming to college and current expenditure of time; a larger proportion hold full-time jobs than is true in the other subgroups. More withdrawals are undecided about their majors, and they tend to live off-campus independently. There are many reasons for their college withdrawal, but these reasons tend to center on current problems (personal, academic, or school/work conflict) rather than negative feelings about college or UMBC. Indeed, the withdrawers are less dissatisfied with UMBC than are continuing students. The off-campus commitments of the withdrawing student are reflected in two other institutional commitment variables: withdrawals often chose UMBC because of its convenient location, and they talked much less to faculty or students than did other student subgroups. Overall, the withdrawals seem to see college in an adjunct rather than primary position in their lives; while UMBC does not dissatisfy them, their lack of goal commitment causes them to withdraw when extracurricular activities conflict.

Having given general descriptions of these three student subgroups, we now must inject a few notes of caution in interpreting these results. First, the descriptions given above are very general - certainly many individuals will not fit these patterns. For a discussion of the heterogeneity of the withdrawing students, the reader is referred to Gordon and Johnson (1982) and

Susege and Johnson (1982). Second, the subgroups were interviewed at somewhat different times in their respective decision-making processes, making comparisons less than fully accurate. The withdrawing students were interviewed just before they withdrew, the non-returning students were interviewed after they had left UMBC, and continuing students were in the midst of an ongoing semester. Finally, response rates were different for the three subgroups. All withdrawing students responded to the questionnaire, due to the withdrawal procedure; but only 36% of the non-returners and 47% of the continuers were able to be contacted. It could not be ascertained whether these lower response rates systematically omitted any particular types of non-returning or continuing students. Despite these possible limitations, we can place increased confidence in the results because of their consistency with initial hypotheses based on other studies. Additionally, the procedures for gathering data were rigorous in the follow-up of students, lending more support to the representativeness of the samples.

If the concepts of institutional and goal commitment do differentiate between retention and attrition and between different types of attrition, what are the implications for retention programs? Little is yet known about whether attempts to change these variables have an impact on retention; but assuming they do, there are several very concrete suggestions we can make.

First, students could be helped to commit themselves to educational goals. Indecision regarding one's major is related to mid-semester attrition; accordingly, more active career exploration programs could be offered to students with undeclared majors. Specific departments might be able to demonstrate the career-relevance of their specialties, to emphasize ultimate goals. Another aspect of goal commitment is the minimizing of extra-curricular priorities; jobs and off-campus residences, for example, are

associated with pulling students away from their studies. Clearly, particularly in times of increasing economic hardship, such financial decisions are often necessary. But students could be encouraged to recognize the difficulty of maintaining both full-time studies and full-time jobs, and they could be encouraged to involve themselves more fully in campus activities even if they must commute to school. Further, programs which help students integrate jobs with eventual career goals and use campus activities as a way of becoming more actively involved in the student's major field would be very useful in helping students more fully commit themselves to higher education.

Second, more student identification with UMBC as an institution would aid in retention. A major variable in this area is the extent to which a student has interactions with others at UMBC outside of class. Our findings suggest that providing more opportunities for students to talk with faculty and other students would assist in retention. It is noteworthy that leavers and continuers have equal amounts of interaction with student service staff (e.g., Financial Aid, Residential Life, or Career Development staff), but that leavers talk less to faculty and students. Apparently, leavers navigate the system by talking with service staff, but do not have opportunities or take the initiative to interact on a more informal basis. A more proactive faculty advisement system might help to close this gap, as would an ongoing orientation program or a "big sibling" program. Campus activities which would make faculty-student or student-student interactions occur more readily are indicated; recent advances in this regard are the Fall Conference and the opening of the Student Center.

Finally, it is useful to know that the mere voicing of dissatisfactions with UMBC does not necessarily lead to leaving. Indeed, we found the continuing students to be far more verbal in their dissatisfactions with UMBC

than were non-returning or withdrawing students. Perhaps it is an indication of the continuing students' involvement at UMBC that they are aware of problems, whereas the student who leaves may not be well enough integrated here to have such an awareness. Whatever the cause, it is clear that we need not fear the expression of dissatisfactions; indeed, the act of expressing such concerns and allowing them to be used constructively could be harnessed as a positive force in retention.

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